DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 408 828 FL 024 568

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TITLE The Dilemmas of English as Second Language Children Learning To Read in an All-English Mainstream Classroom.
PUB DATE Mar 97
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 24-28, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Communication; Discourse Analysis; *English (Second Language); Grade 2; Grade 3; *Grouping (Instructional Purposes); Language of Instruction; Language Role; *Learning Problems; *Limited English Speaking; Primary Education; *Reading Instruction; Transitional Programs

ABSTRACT

A study investigated the kinds of English literacy experiences of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students in a an all-English mainstream classroom, the conceptualizations of ESL students and their English language literacy learning held by a monolingual English-speaking teacher, and instructional strategies used to facilitate ESL students' English language literacy. Subjects were the monolingual teacher, five ESL students, and one native English-speaking student in a mainstream grade 2/3 class with a majority of ESL learners. Data were collected through classroom observation and an interview with the teacher. Results show: (1) heavy dependence on ability-group reading instruction, with ESL children routinely placed in low-ability groups, (2) special effort on the part of school and teacher to create a friendly learning environment, but little connection between the congenial environment and promotion of ESL students' literacy learning, and (3) teacher expectation that the ESL students would learn reading in the same way that native English-speaking children would. Contains 31 references. (MSE)

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The Dilemmas of English as Second Language Children Learning to Read in an All-English Mainstream Classroom

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AERA Annual Meeting 1997, Chicago

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A large number of English as a second language (ESL) students spend most of their schooling time with mainstream teachers in all English-speaking regular classrooms (Penfield, 1987; Harklau, 1994). This fact raises concern for the kind of instruction ESL students receive and the kinds of learning experiences they have in non-ESL mainstream classroom settings.

Some research has been conducted on the literacy abilities of bilingual children learning English as a second language (Garcia, 1991; Au, 1993; Jimenez, 1994; & Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1995); also, guidelines to assist mainstream teachers in dealing with ESL students in their regular classrooms have been suggested (Riddlemoser, 1987; & Hamayan & Perlman, 1990). However, little research has been conducted to explore the area of instruction provided for ESL children by monolingual English-speaking teachers in mainstream classrooms.

Mainstream teachers play an important role in furthering ESL students' learning in their classrooms; to be efficient, they need to identify any difficulties these students may experience in their classrooms and assist them to overcome possible barriers (Chamot & O'Malley, 1989). Whether or not mainstream teachers attend to the needs of ESL children to learn English language literacy is crucial to the ESL children's experience since they spend quite a large amount of their academic life in regular classrooms. Overlooking ESL children's needs to learn English language literacy in a mixed classroom could seriously affect their learning and result in low academic performance.

To understand more about the ESL children's learning in mainstream

classrooms, this study examined the reading instruction that ESL children received in a mainstream classroom where a transitional bilingual education program was being implemented. An important goal of the research was to discern what mainstream teachers can do to promote and enhance the ESL children's literacy learning in general education classrooms. The research questions were:

(a) What kinds of English language literacy learning experiences do ESL children have in an all English-speaking mainstream classroom?

(b) What conceptualizations does a monolingual English-speaking teacher have for ESL children and their English language literacy learning in the mainstream classroom?

(c) What instructional strategies does a mainstream classroom teacher employ to facilitate ESL children's learning of English language literacy?

ESL Children's Literacy Learning in Mainstream Classrooms

Many American elementary teachers conduct their reading instruction in ability groups (Hiebert, 1983). Although the research findings of ability groups are mixed, differentiated instruction and differentiated instructional emphasis (Allington, 1983; Hiebert, 1983; McDermott & Aron, 1978; Worthington, 1991; & Wuthrick, 1990) were found to have negative effect on students in low-ability groups. In other words, ability grouping creates groups of low achievers who suffer from low self-esteem, slower instructional pace as compared to the instructional pace for high-ability groups, low quality instruction, and low expectations from the

teacher (Slavin, 1987).

Differentiated Instruction. Allington (1983) argued that differences in instruction was one factor that contributes to the reading ability between good and poor readers. He examined the issue of the amount of time allocated for reading instruction in elementary school and how it was used, and found that teachers often allocated more instructional time to readers with higher achievement. There was also a tendency for teachers to choose to meet with good readers first, when they tended to be more alert (Wuthrick, 1990). In addition, teachers carry different expectations for students in high- and low-ability groups (Weinstein, 1976). When teachers differentiate their expectations and instructions, it is possible that students are adversely affected in terms of the quality of the instruction they receive and even how they perceive themselves in their academic lives.

Instructional Emphasis. Research findings indicate that instruction for good readers often emphasizes meaning while instruction for poor readers focuses more on decoding skills (Allington, 1983; Hiebert, 1983; Worthington, 1991; & Wuthrick, 1990). It is clear that instruction for low-ability readers is qualitatively different from that for high-ability readers. Moreover, the time allocated for higher-level thinking skills differs greatly for high- and low-ability groups. As stated by Hiebert (1983), "over half of the instructional time in high-ability groups was devoted to meaning-related activities as compared to about one quarter of the instructional time allocated for such tasks in low-ability groups" (p. 236). Such differences in proportion of instruction is apt to have harmful effects on students in

low-ability groups.

Children in high-ability reading groups not only read twice as much text, but they also engage in more contextual reading than children in low-ability groups (Allington, 1980a). In addition, corrections offered to low-ability groups focus more on graphophonemic cues rather than meaning (Allington, 1980b; & Wuthrick, 1990). All of these instructional differences contribute to widening the distance between the reading abilities of good and poor readers.

Teacher Interruption. Teachers are more likely to interrupt less able students than more able students when they read (Hiebert 1983; Worthington 1991; & Wuthrick 1990). Allington (1980b), in research on teacher interruption behavior during oral reading in a first-grade classroom, noted that "teachers interrupted poor readers on 74% of their errors and good readers on only 31% of their errors" (p. 374). The frequent interruption could cause slow readers to rely on an external monitor and a wrong perception that reading is a performing to please someone else (Allington, 1983). Consequently, when students perceive reading as oral reading performance, and when they rely heavily on outsider's help, the development of self-monitoring skills is seriously inhibited (Allington, 1983).

Because ESL children come to general education classrooms with limited English language ability and little mainstream cultural knowledge in comparison to the English native speaking children, they are more likely to be placed in low-ability groups. When they are placed in low-ability groups, they do not get an equal chance at achieving their potential for successful academic performance from the

beginning of their school experience. McDermott and Aron (1978) confirmed that the differentiated instructional organizations (i.e., ability grouping instruction) create inequality in education access and service to students in low ability groups and hinder their potential for successful academic performance.

In addition to instructional organizations, research has shown that time (Collier, 1987), unknown vocabulary (Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1996), and mismatch of home and school culture (Schmidt (1993) are important factors in learning a second language.

Commins (1981) found that immigrant children in Canada developed social interactive skills in English in about two years; and, they needed five to seven years to use academic language appropriate to their grade level. ESL children, particularly less competent learners, need more time to practice and learn the language than their native-speaking peers. If they are assigned to a low-ability group, they not only will not get an equal opportunity to achieve competence in the English language, but also their learning will be negatively affected by the lack of sufficient on-task time and low quality instruction (McDermott & Aron, 1978).

In examining the strategic reading process of 14 sixth- and seventh-grade students, researchers found that unknown vocabulary appeared to be the major obstacle for Latina/o students who were successful English readers (Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1996). The results of the same study indicated that successful Anglo English readers did not need to devote as much of their attention to determine the meaning of the unknown vocabulary. Garcia (1991) also found that

Hispanic children's unfamiliarity with the vocabulary seriously affected their test results. Students were affected both by the unknown vocabulary in the reading passage as well as by the paraphrasing of the text from the passage in the questions and in the answer choices.

The third factor that could affect ESL children's literacy learning in general education classrooms is the differences between the home culture and the school culture. Schmidt (1993), in an ethnographic study of classroom interactions of two kindergarten ESL students, noted that both children struggled hard to "fit in" and also were confused in a mainstream classroom. A major factor contributing to their difficulties was the differences between the home culture and the school culture.

In order to read successfully, second-language learners have to learn the implicit information possessed by the members of the mainstream culture when the texts are created for children of the mainstream culture (Bernhardt, 1993), which is oftentimes the case. Further, in addition to the pressure of using an unfamiliar language to learn the content area knowledge, they have to put in extra effort to learn the culture and the language at the same time.

For the purpose of optimizing ESL children's learning, it is necessary to investigate the influence of ability-grouping on ESL children in general education classrooms to that principles can be found to assist mainstream teachers in recognizing possible difficulties that ESL children might encounter in their classrooms. Additionally, research has shown that ESL children have different cognitive processing styles and possess different cultural schemata. Therefore,

how monolingual mainstream teachers work with ESL children in their general education classroom is critical for ESL children's literacy development and needs to be studied.

Method

The Setting

The setting is a school located in a quiet less wealthy residential neighborhood. The primary reason to do the project in this particular school was that about 70% of the students speak a first language other than English. This school has implemented an ESL program because of the large population of non-English speaking students. A multilingual/multicultural program has been in place since 1973, and its content-based ESL program has been recognized as a program of academic excellence by the U.S. Department of Education (program brochure).

At the time of entering the program, the ESL children are placed in regular classrooms according to their grade levels and are given an English proficiency test. Depending on the test results, they go to the ESL classes at different times of the day for varying amounts of time. Later, at the end of each school year, based on the ESL teacher's recommendations and the results of standardized tests, the school administrators decide whether or not a particular child continues to go to the ESL classes as well as the amount of time s/he goes to the ESL classes (personal communication, September 28, 1995).

The Participants

The teacher is a white monolingual English-speaking female in her mid-

thirties. There are 27 students in this class: 13 male students and 14 female students. Twenty out of 27 students in this class are ESL learners. Among the 16 second graders, 12 of them are ESL students and 10 out of the 12 still go to ESL classes part of the day. Eight out of the 11 third graders are ESL learners and four of them still go to ESL classes part of the day.

Six students (5 ESL and 1 English-native language) were selected for participation. The only criterion for selection of these students was that they were either from the highest or the lowest reading group. The purpose was to compare the instruction in both groups and to determine how students in the two groups responded to the teaching.

Procedures

The data were collected through three classroom observations and an interview with the classroom teacher. The three classroom observations were conducted on consecutive Thursdays from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. The first observation focused on the setting, the second visit looked at one particular ESL student, and the third one observed the ability-group reading instruction. Data included field notes, tape-recording of the reading group instruction, the teacher interview, a class curriculum and schedule handout from the teacher, and two brochures of the ESL programs from the school administrator.

The teacher interview was conducted after the three observation sessions to find out the students' cultural backgrounds, grade level, home language, years in the United States, and other relevant information available to the teacher. In

addition, the teacher's perceptions about having ESL children in her classroom and what she has done to attend to the needs of ESL children English language literacy learning was asked.

Data Analyses

Multiple methods--interview, observation, and tape-recording--to collect data. The reason for using a variety of methods is to validate findings through triangulation (Nunan, 1992; & Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). The tape-recording of the reading-group instructions was transcribed. The analyses focused on categorizing factors contributing to creating positive learning environments, instructional focuses of different reading groups, teaching techniques used with high- and low-ability reading groups, and student-teacher interaction of different reading groups.

Discussion of Findings

The intent of this study was to present a partial picture of an ESL children's English language literacy learning experience in a mainstream classroom. One major phenomenon which emerged from the observations was the dependence on ability-group reading instruction. ESL children, especially, were routinely placed in the low group, a highly disadvantaged learning situation. Because their needs for effective learning were neglected, their potential to achieve successful academic performance may be hindered.

Two other findings of this study are related to the learning environment and the teacher's attitude. First, the school and the teacher seemed to expend special

effort to create a friendly, learning environment; however, the instruction observed seemed not to connect nor to build on the congenial environment in promoting ESL children's English literacy learning. Second, regardless of the diverse cultural and language backgrounds, the teacher expected ESL children to learn in exactly the same way as English native-speaking children.

A friendly learning environment without enough connection made for ESL children's English literacy learning

In this particular school, evidences such as a "Welcome" poster in many different languages, a world map indicating where children in this school originated, and a Chinese silk embroidery craft, demonstrated an effort to accept or even embrace the children's diverse cultural backgrounds. Similarly, the decorations in the classroom observed seemed to project a friendly and accepting atmosphere towards non-mainstream children's cultures as well. For example, the drawings of different ethnic children standing hand-in-hand.

In addition to the seeming acceptance of diverse cultures, the teacher tried to create a print-rich and an encouraging literacy learning environment. Several commercially made posters which advocated the benefits of literacy learning, such as "Reading is the way to grow," "Bone up on reading," and "Book is a present you can open again and again," were hung near the library center. Different bulletin boards were designed to either publish students' writing, such as "Explore with your mind" or illustrate other people's work such as "Trumpet club author" bulletin board.

Moreover, writing utensils and paper were sufficient and easy to access.

Children were observed to grab paper whenever they needed. Books on a specific topic were displayed in the front section of the room. A classroom library was located right next to the reading center. Magazines and reference books were also available in different locations of the classroom.

The environment created was friendly and encouraging for the learning of literacy, and ESL children appeared to be quite comfortable in this environment. However, it was not clear that the teacher took advantage of ESL children's diverse cultural heritages to benefit their learning. In the interview, the teacher stated that when there was an opportunity, such as at the Chinese Lunar New Year, she would introduce different culture to the students. Basically, however, she did not do anything special for ESL children when designing regular instructional activities. Furthermore, the book collections in the classroom library, the textbooks used, and the activities observed did not seem to reflect a multicultural orientation.

Research on social-cultural identity suggested that many ESL students found school a strange and an alien environment (Au, 1993; & Schmidt, 1993). Although more than two-thirds of the children in this class were from non-mainstream culture, the teacher did not seem to consider that children's non-mainstream cultural backgrounds might play a role in their learning. In other words, the teacher was not aware of the fact that a mismatch of the home-school culture might interfere with their learning in school (Ovando & Collier, 1985).

ESL children suffered from ability-group reading instruction

The reading instruction in this class was based on children's English

language proficiency levels. Children were grouped according to the results of an informal English language proficiency test at the beginning of the school year. There are several problems with this kind of structure. First, the tests were administered in English, and it could be that the children may have been able to answer the question but that they did not understand the test instruction. Second, it is very possible that ESL children may be able to comprehend the text and yet may not be able to respond well enough in English (Barrera, 1984; Moll et al, 1980; Lanauze & Snow, 1989; & Garcia, 1991). Third, the reliability of administering the test and the validity of grading the tests are in doubt because there were different test administrators and graders.

Not only is the grouping method highly questionable, but also the differential instructional treatment and learning environments created could even result in harmful effects on children in low ability groups (McDermott & Aron, 1978). In comparing the highest (Peter Rabbit) and the lowest (Reading Kids) reading group instruction, several phenomena were found. These were differentiated by the instructional time and emphasis, the teacher's interruption behavior, the teacher's expectations, and the students' language performance. Detailed discussion of these aspects follows.

Differentiated instructional time and emphasis. The instructional time for the high-ability group was ten minutes while the instructional time for the low-ability group was barely seven minutes. This confirms what Allington (1983) had found that teachers often allocated more instructional time to readers with higher

achievement.

The instructional emphasis for the low- and high-group was found to be different as well. In the high-ability group, the teacher often tried not to give direct answers; she either paraphrased the questions or gave clues to encourage the students to search out the answers. For example, the following illustrates how the teacher paraphrased questions for the students.

C: "Where does the story take place?"
T: "What's the setting of the story? Where does it take place at?"
C: "The black sally, the white sally"
T: "No, where is it happened at? Is it in the city? Is it--"

In addition, in providing clues for students, the teacher referred back to a previous reading task to activate appropriate schema so that meaningful facts could be drawn from the current reading assignment. For example, when they were discussing why people travel together, the teacher reminded them of the story of Laura Wilde Ingles which they had read before and related the information to be used for the current reading. This teaching strategy was not utilized in the instruction to the low-ability group.

Below is an example of the teacher's "confirming student strategy" even though it was not considered a good strategy. Again, this kind of strategy instruction was not found in her instruction to the bottom group.

T: "Why would you want to write it?"
E: "It says it..."
T: "Okay look into the story, if you can't remember, look back. We said it before that if you can't remember something, isn't it okay to look back? Yea. [Half way of the teacher's talking, Kent said something.] What does it

say?

One might infer that because the teacher taught reading strategies, i.e., inferencing and processing information, only to the high group, that she considered students in low group incapable of performing these kinds of tasks.

The transcribed data of the two reading groups clearly showed that the teacher asked more why questions in the top group and more yes-no questions in the bottom group. Two examples are given below. Example one is an extract from the high group and extract two is a series of questions asked by the teacher in the low group.

(1) K: "Why did many of the pioneers travel together on wagon train?"
T: "What do you think? Why do they travel together?"
E: "Because they want to get to the same place and they..." [Before she finished the sentence, Cynthia cut in.]
C: "Because they wanted to get to the same place at the same time."
T: "Well, that's true, but why do you think that there is another reason..." [Cynthia cut in again before she finished the sentence.]

(2) T: "We read a story yesterday, tell me a little bit about the story. What was the story about, who remembers?"
C: "We are best friends."
T: "It's called 'We are best friends.' And who was in the story? Who are the characters in the story?"
J: "Uh..Peter"
C: "Peter and Robert."
T: "Peter and Robert..and were they friends or enemy?"
C: "Friends."
...
T: "Were they nice to each other or were they mean to each other?"
C: "No, they were.." [Before he could finish talking, the teacher cut in.]
...

T: "Peter moved away. And then what happened? Were they happy or were they sad?"
J: "Sad."
...
T: "They wrote letters, didn't they? Did that make them feel better?"
J: "Hum." [not an obvious sound.]

Unlike the why questions asked in the high group, the questions asked in this group were primarily literal questions. It is also very obvious that in the bottom group, the teacher was the one who initiated the questions. Most importantly, she gave primarily yes-no questions. It could be that the teacher wanted to make sure that the children were able to answer the questions. This is similar to what McDermott and Aron (1978) found, that in dealing with children in the bottom group, one adaptation teachers made was to make sure that no child is asked to read something too difficult.

The two sets of data clearly indicate a differentiated instructional focus. The high-ability group was given more training on higher-order thinking skills whereas the low-ability group was given more instruction on literal interpretations. This is consistent with what research had found that instruction for good readers often emphasizes more meaningful activities while instruction for poor readers focuses more on lower level reading skills (Allington, 1983; Cazden, 1981; Hiebert, 1983; McDermott and Aron, 1978; Worthington, 1991; & Wuthrick, 1990).

Teacher's differentiated expectations. The examples in the previous section also demonstrate that the teacher carried different expectations for the students in high- and low-ability groups (Weinstein, 1976). In the high-ability group, the

teacher had higher expectations for the students thus that she asked them many "why" questions and clues instead of direct answers. On the other hand, the teacher considered students in the low-ability group less able because she gave them primarily yes-no questions and rarely any "why" questions.

In addition, the fact that the teacher paraphrased more questions for the high-ability group also supports the supposition that the teacher carried higher expectations for good readers. Because the teacher expected that the good readers were capable of answering the questions, she therefore wanted to make sure that they did understand the questions. Conversely, poor readers might not be able to answer the questions regardless whether she had paraphrased the questions or not. So, she paraphrased less questions.

The teacher's lower expectation might also come from the assumption that children in the low-ability group, particularly ESL children, might not understand the language, either written or spoken, because of their poor oral English language ability. This false assumption may undoubtedly devastate ESL children's learning of English language literacy. Research has shown that some ESL children are able to comprehend the text and yet may not be able to respond well enough in English (Moll et al, 1980; Lanauze & Snow, 1989; & Garcia, 1991). It could also be that insufficient time was given for them to respond. The following dialogue illustrates that two students in the low-ability group clearly were able to answer the question, but the teacher did not give them enough time to respond.

T: "(laughing)..That's true, that's a good clue, isn't it? Yea, but what happened in the story that you know that they

were friends."
J,C: "They were.." [**Cut off by the teacher.**]
T: "Were they nice to each other or were they mean to each other?"

As shown from the dialogue, two children were ready to answer a more complicated question on how they knew that the two characters in the story were friends. The teacher cut them off and instead started a yes-no question that contained an answer for her previous question. It is possible that she did not believe that they were able to give her the answer she expected thus she quickly gave them another question that contained an answer.

Moreover, at one point in the instruction to the low group, the teacher sighed. This happened when she asked Chris, a child labeled with a learning disability, to explain whether or not he was sad when he moved away from the place he lived, and he gave her chopped information. That was obviously an indication of "disappointment" or a sign of "what can I do?" This type of behavior might lead children to think that they are not good enough and in turn becomes an obstacle to their learning. The teacher's different attitudes towards the top and bottom group clearly reflect her different expectations of the students in the two group.

Teacher's Interruption behavior. Research states that teachers allow less time for students to correct themselves in the low-ability groups (Wuthrick 1990). This was not found to be true in this particular classroom. It could be that there was no reading of new material in the particular observed section. However, it was found that the teacher had a tendency to interrupt students' responses when the

responses were not what she was expecting in both the high and low groups.

The following example was from the low group, the teacher interrupted the response because the answer the student was going to deliver did not correspond to the question she had asked.

T: "Were they nice to each other or were they mean to each other?"
C: "No, they were.." [**Cut off by the teacher.**]
T: "What happened? Tell us about the story."

Two examples from the high-ability group are given below:

(1) T: "Right, it's exploring. Going new places you never been before and ..so..they wanted to go with other people. That's why they went on the wagon train. They were scared. Would you have been scared?"
C,E: "Hum Hun."
K: "Yea, if I were..." [Cut off by Etha.]
E: "There were still in the...but they are not..." [**Cut off by the teacher.**]
T: "Now, what did I tell you about being a pioneer last year, we talked about..."

(2) T: "That was good, but it would not have been good a few years ago."
E: "But...it was good dry food..." [**Cut off by the teacher.**]
T: "Okay, let's finish up. We need to finish."

The first example clearly demonstrates that the teacher interrupted a student's response and redirected the child to discuss what she wanted to be discussed. In the second excerpt, the student held an opposite opinion to the teacher, and the teacher interrupted her talk and proceeded to the next question. It should not be concluded that the teacher interrupted students' responses because they were not giving the answers she wanted simply based upon three examples. Further investigation needs to be conducted in order to find out a more regular pattern of

the teacher's interruption behavior.

Qualitatively and quantitatively different language performance. The findings of this study are consistent with research findings in that instructions for high- and low-ability groups are qualitatively different (Allington, 1980a; Allington, 1983; Hiebert, 1983; McDermott, & Aron, 1978; Wuthrick, 1990; & Worthington, 1991). As a result of the distinguished instructional structures, students' language outputs are both quantitatively and qualitatively different.

Not only was the instructional time allocated differently to different ability groups, but the language produced by children at each group was also very different in terms of quantity and quality. The following table illustrates the quantitative difference of language produced by the two groups.

Table 1: Number of times spoken by the teacher and members of each group

Peter Rabbit (high-ability) group: (Instructional time was **10** minutes.)

Name	Teacher	Etha	Cynthia	Kent
Number of times spoken	47	33	30	20

Reading Kids (low-ability) group: (Instructional time was **7** minutes.)

Name	Teacher	Chris	Janie	Lily
Number of times spoken	46	33	10	6

As seen from the table, the teacher talked more in the less proficient group because she spoke about the same number of times in a shorter instructional time period. As a result, students in the low group talked less and students in high group talked more. In addition, even though Chris spoke 33 times, he was a child

with a learning disability who spoke not only very slowly but punctuated his conversation with a lot of pauses as well.

Further, the instruction for the low group was interrupted three times. One time was when the teacher stopped the instruction to manage the classroom, and the other two times happened when other students came to speak with her. This kind of interruption further reduces the time that the low group had to learn to read. The actual on-task time for students in the low group is much less than that of the students in the top group.

As for the quality of language produced, children in the high group often generated longer and more complex sentences while children in the low group used fewer words and more simple-structured sentences. Two sets of examples of each child from the two groups are given below:

(1) High group:
E: "Because they want to want to get to the same place and they..." [Before she finished the sentence, Cynthia cut in.]
C: "Because they wanted to get to the same place at the same time."
K: "Because they didn't have any cars and ..or whatever."

(2) Low group:
C: "Yea [pause] I wrote a letter to them. But they [pause] never came. See, [pause] I gave the letter [pause] and then I just found them sitting there."
J: "Yea, because I didn't really have any friend in there."
L: "Yea."

In the case of the low group, the example above was the longest sentence that Janie produced during the entire reading instruction. Most of the time, she and Lily gave only one-word answers. This might have been because the teacher gave them

yes-no type questions instead of why questions in order to prompt more elaborate answers.

One other interesting phenomenon was that children in the high group were all eager to give their opinions which had resulted in a lot of overlapped speech. This did not occur in the low group. It was often the case instead that the teacher called on the students in order to get responses, particularly with Janie and Lily. McDermott and Aron (1978) found that teachers used calling on students randomly as a strategy to keep students in the low group attentive. This was not as obvious in this particular low group because Chris dominated the discussion, and Janie and Lily would never get their turn to speak had the teacher not called on them.

The group dynamics were dramatically different between the two groups; one was very active while the other in contrast was very passive. The members of high group socialized with each other before, during, and after the instruction, and they were all eager to express themselves. This was not observed in the low group. Members of the low group waited silently for the teacher to start the instruction and left in silence when the instruction ended, and most of the time, they waited for the teacher to call on them.

Finally, the reading materials for the low group were reading materials for first-grade students. In other words, they were below the appropriate reading level. Contrary to the fact that students in the low group need to read more and use more language in order to catch up with other students in the class, they were reading simpler and fewer texts. They produced much less amount of speaking

language as well, in comparison to students in the high group. The discrepancy between students in the two groups thus increased, and the opportunity for students in the low group to succeed academically was seriously and negatively affected.

ESL children were expected to learn like English-native-speaking children

Despite the unequal repertoire of English language literacy that ESL children have and the differences in culturally-related discourse styles, the teacher expected them to learn and function just as the English-native language children. In the interview, she mentioned that children came into the class with diverse proficiency levels, both the native and non-native children; thus, it was unnecessary to distinguish native and non-native speakers or design special instructional activities for ESL children.

However, when she was asked how she dealt with her ESL children, she stated that "I try to be very caring and understanding because I want them to feel comfortable. When they are comfortable is when they start learning. It is important not to treat them as handicapped, like what I heard in other schools, so that they learn better and faster." She also noted that she would explain vocabulary that might be foreign to children from the non-mainstream culture, and sometimes she would give ESL children more time in answering questions. It seemed that she noticed that "unknown vocabulary" is a problem for the ESL learners (Jimenez, 1994).

Based on what she said that she did with the ESL children, it can be argued

that she gave special treatment to the ESL children in her class. However, caring and understanding attitudes are needed for all students regardless of their language backgrounds. In addition, the behavior to which she has subscribed of explaining "foreign" vocabulary and giving longer time for responding was not observed. It could be that the time of observation was too limited.

In order to gain a more complete picture of ESL children's English literacy learning in this particular mainstream classroom, how the teacher determines that a vocabulary is foreign to the ESL students, and how much longer time she gives to ESL children as compared to the native speakers needs to be further investigated.

Conclusion

This study intended to present a partial picture of the experiences that ESL children have in developing their English language literacy in an all-English mainstream classroom. The observations focused on the classroom environment and the major technique used by the teacher in reading instruction--ability-group reading instruction. The findings indicate that ESL children, particularly the less competent ESL children, were not as successful in building their English language literacy.

The debilitating factors that less proficient ESL learners faced in this classroom were several. First, they suffered from having less on-task time when they actually demanded more on-task time in order to catch up with their more proficient peers. Second, they were reading less and simpler texts in comparison to their native-speaking classmates when in fact they needed to read much more and

practice speaking the language more.

Third, the teacher expected the same responses from the ESL children as the native-speaking children when in fact they were different. They came into the classroom with different cultural background and less years of experience in using the English language, i.e., less vocabulary, very limited clues for cultural meanings embedded in the language, and so forth. In addition, they most likely utilized very different cognitive processing styles and schemata (Ovando & Collier, 1985). Teachers who view them as exactly the same as monolingual English-speaking students are ignoring their special needs for effective learning and denying them the continued support they may need subsequently when they are not in specialized ESL program.

Finally, the teacher had low expectations for these children. Whenever teachers differentiate their expectations and instructions, students can be adversely affected in terms of the quality of the instruction they receive as well as how they perceive themselves in their academic lives. Research indicated that there is a high degree of relationship between self-perception and reading group status (Hiebert, 1983) and that ability group placement usually becomes permanent (Worthington, 1991). Students with low self-esteem might have low or even no motivation to learn which, in turn, may result in low academic achievement.

To conclude, research has indicated that ability-group reading instruction is harmful to members of the low group; they suffer from slower instructional pace as compared to that of the high group, low quality instruction, and low expectations

from the teacher (Slavin, 1987). All of these were found in the ability-group reading instruction in this particular classroom. It could be detrimental even for a native speaking child to be in the low group; therefore, it is much more devastating for an ESL child to be in a low group.

Because ESL children are not yet proficient in English language, they demand more of the teacher's time because they need to practice more in using the target language. Being in the low group, they get less of the teacher's time and less practice time. This further widens the gap between them and their more proficient peers. Also, it denies the chance for low-achieving ESL children to potentially succeed academically.

The presentation of these particular ESL children's English literacy learning experience in a regular classroom intended to provide educators and researchers an insight into some possible difficulties that ESL children experience in a mainstream classroom setting. The implication of this study is for practitioners. Mainstream teachers in classrooms with children from diverse cultural backgrounds need to be cautioned with the use of ability-group reading instruction. Further, in creating and implementing more teaching techniques for effective learning, they need to take into account of ESL children's needs in developing English language literacy in mainstream classrooms.

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